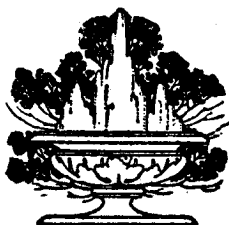


IRREPRESSIBLE AMERICA

by
SCOTT NEARING



LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY
70 Fifth Ave., New York.

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THE LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

70 Fifth Ave., New York City.

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By SCOTT NEARING

Author of

"WAGES IN THE UNITED STATES", "INCOME",
"THE AMERICAN EMPIRE", ETC.

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IRREPRESSIBLE AMERICA

Coming Back

The American people are coming back. Difficulties assail them; hard times oppress them; the dissolution of Imperial Europe terrifies them; the war-time orgy fagged them; the dullness of peace without work appals them, and yet they are coming back. The people are going to work, where they can find it; they are cutting down their expenditures to meet diminished incomes; they are accepting the new situation and continuing their lives just as though the war had not upset them during four hectic years. To be sure there are some who will never come back—old people, disappointed people, broken people, to whom the war brought irretrievable disaster; but the twenty odd millions of children in the public schools are taking their places, millions of them each year, in the ranks of the bread-winners; and beside them are the other millions of young, energetic, hopeful, ambitious men and women with futures to carve out, homes to make and families to support. Life is beckoning to this multitude and the multitude is rushing out to meet life.

During my recent trips through the eastern, western and southern sections of the country, I have come into contact

with all kinds of people in all types of industrial districts. I have met them, talked with them, listened to their stories and have come away with some pretty clear impressions.

In these trips, as the miles have flown away behind me across the Alleghenies and out upon the prairie, I have been impressed first of all by the fact that the cities and towns stand as they stood in 1914, with the same wide streets, shaded by the same elms and maples; with the same wooden cottages set back behind their lawns; with the same blocks of brick or stone office buildings and stores; with the same school buildings and stations and factories and libraries and court-houses dominating the architecture of the clustering community. Between these cities and towns stretch the same farms with their cosy houses and their big barns and cattle-sheds, acre after acre, fence-line upon fence-line.

There are more good school buildings now than there were before the World War, and there has been a vast improvement in the grading and the surfacing of many of the roads, but, with these exceptions, and with the further exception of a few new houses, factories, stations, hotels and office buildings, the country looks just as it did in 1914.

The Farm

The farmers are sowing their winter wheat; harvesting their corn; taking care of their cattle and hogs. There is less hired help because, as one farmer put it, "The difference between profit and loss now-a-days is in the wages of the help we employ." Consequently the price paid for husking corn and picking potatoes has dropped to a small fraction of the 1919 figures, and the farmer has taken his sons and

daughters and his wife into the fields to do their own work. What they cannot do themselves they leave undone—it is cheaper that way. The corn is being burned on many farms because it is cheaper than coal, and it stands in the fields until it is needed for the stoves and furnaces.

"I am feeling tired," one farmer said. "I don't seem to get enough rest. There are the cows twice a day, and the farm work and the chores. I've been starting around four and quitting around nine or ten ever since spring, and going about seven days out of the week." His story is that of millions who have been afraid to hire help on the present low markets and who, instead, have undertaken to work a sixteen-hour day.

Of course the country is tired after the war—tired as a gambler at four in the morning; tired as a person who has had a narrow escape in a train wreck, and who has worked feverishly for hours to drag out the wounded and identify the dead; tired as a dreamer who has devoted himself for days to the pursuit of some phantom of his imagining. And because the country is so tired it is a bit stupid and sullen in spots. Yet there are other spots where the tone of resentment is loud enough to wake the dozers. On the whole, however, it is the grip of moral inertia that is most pronounced. Fed up on horrors and scandals, the people turn uneasily. Those with more energy and courage are even speaking out loud, and denouncing some of the very principles which a few short years ago constituted the core of civilization, the goal toward which all good citizens and loyal Americans must strive on peril of their reputations, if not of their lives.

The people believe that the United States won the war. To deny it is like denying the self-evident truths of nature.

Discontent

Still no one is satisfied. The militarists have not secured enough militarism, while the business men have too many taxes. The workers are overwhelmed with wage cuts and unemployment; the republicans failed to get the prosperity for which 16 millions of them voted in November, 1920; certainly the most ardent democrat can hardly contend that the war, fathered by his party, has made the world safe for democracy; the pacifists did not get peace, nor did the revolutionaries get world revolution. Only the profiteers passed beyond their objectives, and even they are grumbling when they are called upon to pay their income taxes of one year out of the profits (or deficits) of the next.

The United States, in a word, is a disappointed, grouchy country, going back to work. It is a country of working people who had the feeling—last night—that to-day would be a holiday; but morning has dawned, and with the dawn, there is the sound of the six o'clock whistle.

After covering the first thousand miles and getting as far as Chicago or St. Louis, the traveller begins to realize that there is something to the west of the Alleghenies—black land, railroads, shops, mines, people. After covering the second thousand miles and reaching the Rockies, the traveller feels a secret bond of sympathy with the natives when they speak of New York as though it were a suburb of America and of Boston as though it were an outlying village. Here in the Mississippi valley, with its millions of rolling, teeming acres, lies the centre of the Continent's future civilization. This is America.

The World of Business

Business is bad throughout the country and there is little indication that there will be an early resumption.

The present economic system is so organized that there must be a buyer with money or credit in his hands, before goods are produced or released from the warehouses. The streets of a city may be filled with barefooted children, but no shoes will be made until the children get money with which to buy them. It is purchasing power, therefore, that is the fuel of industry.

Purchasing power in the United States, measured in money terms, has been cut nearly in two during the past two years. The resulting devastation in the business world may easily be imagined.

A little more than a tenth of the products turned out in the United States is sold to the export trade. In 1920 American exports reached the unprecedented figure of 8,108 millions of dollars. For the fiscal year of 1921, however, exports fell to 6,516 millions.*

Demoralized foreign markets and adverse exchange rates together with the world-wide industrial depression are reducing the export trade of the country to about one-half of its 1919 and 1920 values.

Domestic purchasing power is being likewise curtailed.

There are about seven millions of farmers in the United States, who, with their families, make up nearly a third of

*The figures for November, 1920 were 676 millions; for November, 1921, 295 millions.

the entire population. The income of the farmer depends upon the prices that he can get for his crops. Within the past two years the prices of the principal farm staples have fallen from thirty to seventy per cent.*

In the fall and winter of 1921, the farmer was in receipt of less than one-half the income that he received during 1919 or 1920.

The same thing has happened to salary and wage-earners that has happened to the farmers. Wages have been cut in most of the principal industries from 20 to 60 per cent. Men are now being hired for work in the steel mills at 30 cents per hour as against 65 or 70 cents two years ago. In Cleveland and other mid-western cities the unskilled labor rate has fallen to \$2 per day. Contractors in these cities are advertising for men at 15 cents per hour. In the Michigan potato belt, men were offered as little as a dollar per day and board to pick potatoes. Where the depression is most severe, wages in many cases are already below the 1913 level.

Unemployment

But this is only one-half of the picture.

The wage rates have fallen. So have the number of working hours per week. There is some dispute as to the facts, but the number of unemployed is variously estimated at from 3,750,000 to 5,700,000, while millions more — the

*Cattle which sold in July, 1920, for \$16 per hundred pounds, were worth but \$7 a year and a half later, while, during the same period, corn dropped from \$1.50 to 50 cents, wheat, from \$2.95 to \$1.15 and cotton, from 39 cents to 18 cents in spite of the loss of half the crop.

miners, for example,—are working only three or four days per week.

Again, as with the farmers, incomes among the thirty-five millions of wage and salary earners have fallen precipitately, while the number of totally unemployed is from three to five times as great as it was in the summer of 1920.

These reductions in incomes have been somewhat offset by the reductions in prices. Wholesale prices are off perhaps fifty per cent, but are still above the pre-war level, while the course of retail prices is slowly downward.

Here, then, is the business situation. In a business community where prosperity depends upon purchasing power, there have been slashing cuts in incomes without any corresponding reductions in prices.

The situation is having its effect on the number of business failures, which rose from 6,451 in 1919 and 8,881 in 1920, to an average of over 1500 failures per month for the first eleven months of 1921.*

Many experts are taking a gloomy view of the situation. Mr. W. P. G. Harding, Governor of the Federal Reserve Board, wrote, in an article published September 28, 1921: "All history shows that periods of prosperity and depression come in cycles, the rotation being about as follows: (1) Prosperity, (2) Liquidation, (3) Stagnation, and (4) Revival. At the present time the process of liquidation is well advanced." There remain the periods of stagnation and of revival that may stretch away for years into the future.

All of these facts are known to the well informed business

*In November, 1919, there were 551 failures; in November, 1920, there were 1,050 failures, and in November, 1921, there were 1,988 failures.

men of the country, and yet they are generally optimistic. It was during October, 1921, that Mr. Charles M. Schwab spoke before a group of Chicago men and advised them that the best thing to do was to smile. Generally speaking, they seem to be following his advice. Even when the smile becomes a grin, they continue to wear it with undaunted vigor.

"The Essential Government"

The chambers of commerce throughout the country are acting as they learned to act during the war. In those days of national emergency, the leading business men of each community took charge of the important work to be done, just as though they had been duly elected to public office. The war is over, but the habit lingers, and the leading members of the chamber of commerce and the board of trade continue to take themselves and their work as seriously as they did during the war, and to function as the essential government. In Kansas City, the Chamber of Commerce has recently issued its annual report to the people of the city. The papers gave the report columns of space, and well they might, for it dealt with the most important and vital questions before the city in a more authoritative manner than the mayor and council would ordinarily assume.

There are cities like Toledo and Massillon, where an election fight has recently been waged on this very issue—the Chamber of Commerce versus the remainder of the community. Such opposition is rare, however. In the average town, the chamber of commerce acts as though it were the official guardian of the community, and the citizens respond as though they agreed with this assumption.

Little business men are hustling for business. The laundrymen, grocers, vegetable dealers and bakers are once more getting acquainted with the babies of their customers. The high-handedness that characterized the period of the war has been replaced by the suavity of peace. Even the hotel clerks feel the pressure of the new situation.

During the war it was as much as a man's temper was worth to attract the attention of a hotel clerk long enough to be told that the house was full-up. Now, and particularly in the smaller hotels, the clerks have taken off their frock coats and put on jumpers.

"So you want a double room," said the clerk in a Dayton Hotel to two young chaps who had just come in. Then he mentioned prices.

The young men demurred. The clerk quoted a lower figure. "Take it for a week," he said, "and I can do still better—and it's a nice room."

"All right," said the spokesman, "let's see the room."

"Sure," from the clerk, "that's what I'm here for." He reached for the key adding, "Have a cigar?", as two very decent looking ones slid across the counter to the prospective customers.

Customers are scarce in every line. Business is hard to get,—so hard that even the hotel clerks are acting as though they were only human money grubbers after all.

The World of Labor

The same catastrophe which has bowled over the prosperity of the world of business has played havoc with the world of labor. How could it be otherwise when the world of

labor depends upon the world of business for the opportunity to earn its daily bread?

The farmers—a third of the workers of the country—must pay high prices for the things that they buy, while they are offered low prices for the goods that they have to sell. The result is that they are storing their grain, as far as they can, in anticipation of a rise in price, while, as one of them put it, “We do not go to town because we are afraid we might see something that we would want to buy.” So the rural towns are dead, while the farmer, dismissing the hired man, goes out into the field to husk his own corn—perhaps for the elevator; perhaps for the stove.

The industrial workers are equally hard hit. Unemployment, as has been stated, is rife everywhere, but particularly in those regions which depend for their industrial activity upon the demand for some form of machinery—engines, automobiles, farm equipment and the like. At all points there have been wage-cuts, and part-time work is quite general in all of the important industries. Rents have not decreased greatly. Prices are reduced on some articles, but for the most part the worker is living on a far lower income level than that of the past few years.

There was a characteristic situation in Cleveland where I went to speak for a church forum. The Sunday that I was there the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* contained two pages of ads., listing houses and apartments for rent. Men were taking jobs at two dollars a day, and there were advertisements for labor at fifteen cents an hour. “Are many of the men in your church out of work?”, I asked the man in charge of the forum. “We have fifteen trustees,” he replied. “At the moment, eleven of them are looking for jobs.” In a neighboring town I talked with a mechanic who had had eleven weeks of work in the

past ten months. He had invested his last six dollars in silk stockings which he proposed to sell "among the swells".

In some of the smaller industrial cities visited during my trips there was no factory or shop running on full time, and in some, none of the important plants were running at all. In these places the outlook was as dark as it had been at any time in their history, and yet the attitude of the men was the same everywhere.

"Yes," said a machinist in a town on the Mississippi, "all three of the shops here are closed at the moment, but they are going to open up again in a couple of months. Wages must come down, I suppose. They are already cut nearly in half."

The air was full of promises of resumption. In many instances, the resumption was scheduled to take place as soon as the men were willing to accept the posted reductions in wages together with the open shop. There were no strikes in progress—just a tacit agreement to try it out and see who could stand it the longest.

"No, I don't look for any wage cut," said a conductor on the Santa Fé.

"Yes, we are running light to-night," he replied in answer to a question. "If this is all the business we do on these through trains, what must it be like on the smaller roads! Things will pick up though."

The same tone of optimism prevades the labor world that is to be found in the business world. "This thing will hardly last more than six months," they say.

Trade Unions

Meanwhile there is a heavy loss in the union membership.* The opinion among the union officials seemed to be that the unions were losing their war-time gains. The unions are still thinking in terms of craft organization and internal politics. Their loudest utterance is a hunger cry, and their watchword, in a pinch,—“I won’t play”.

The Santa Fé conductor was discussing the rail strike. “I never could see what interest we have in their affairs anyway,” he said, referring to the trainmen. “Let them fight their own battles.”

The war has come and the war has gone, but the labor organizations of the United States are still the labor organizations of the United States—the same yesterday, today, and, so some of them seem to believe, forever.

Of course there are the radical members and the radical officials, who, like Howat of the Miners, are willing to go to the mat on what they believe to be their rights. But they are few and far between, at least in the realm of officialdom. That was pretty clearly demonstrated in the case of Howat—voted down in the Miners Convention; later deposed by Lewis as President of the Kansas District, all the time that he was under sentence, and after the convention, actually in prison for the crime of calling a strike.

I stopped for a day at Columbus, Kansas, during one of my

*In one city where the industries were fairly stable, the membership in the machinists union at the time of my visit had dropped from 1300 to 600. In some of the Ohio automobile towns, the membership in the same union had fallen to a fifth of its 1920 proportions.

trips, and made an effort to see Howat. But the day that I had happened to strike town was not a visiting day, and I might as well have tried to see the Emperor of Japan. The business men of Columbus regarded Howat as they might a wild beast. The miners of the neighboring coal fields were with him, but the strikes called as a protest against his imprisonment seemed to be petering out. The strong arm of the state had him, and what could a handful of workers do against a State?

The State

That new attitude is growing very fast. It was first stated by Lewis, when he referred to the Federal Injunction against the coal miners with the remark that they could not fight against the government. The railroad workers made the same answer during the negotiations in October and November, 1921. Even the oil workers of Southern California, after seventeen weeks of strike, replied to a message from the United States Secretary of Labor (who is a banker), "Even a suggestion from the Government will be respected."

During the war the great god State got a foothold in the country and secured so firm a grip on the imaginations of the people that even the miners and the railroaders take off their hats at the mere mention of its name.

The living standards of the workers are being steadily beaten down through unemployment, wage-cuts, and short time. Union membership is dwindling. The open shop campaign, carried on in all parts of the country, has resulted in the disruption of more than one organization. What the chambers of commerce did not do through their publicity

and the activity of their industrial spies, the state and federal governments have done through the use of the constabulary and the injunction. The workers still cling to their craft organizations, and hope that things will pick up after the wage-cuts are all made. The world of labor is organized less than twenty per cent; the world of business is organized about ninety per cent, and the members of the rival organizations think and act accordingly.

Radicalism

Radicalism is about as much at home in the middle west as a rubber tree is at home on the Dakota prairies—not because of the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan. It simply doesn't belong.

Of course there are exceptions to this general rule, but the attitude of the people is summed up in the one word "Aquiescence".

I picked the word up in Texas, on the last train that ran over the International and Great Western before the strike of the trainmen took place. The situation was rather tense, and I was trying to get a correct view of the motives that lay back of the strike, so I spent a great deal of time talking to the railroad men that I met. All were guarded. In fact, no one in Texas discusses public questions above a stage whisper. Finally I found the brakemen of our train sitting in the smoking car, so I sat down beside him and asked him why the trainmen were going out before the rest of the crafts.

The trainman turned to me and said: "Friend, there is a law on the books of Texas called the Open Port Law. It was passed during the big dock strike last year. Under

that law, if we talk over the strike in a public place, we are both liable to be sent to jail for conspiracy."

The man was about thirty. His face was keen, and he spoke with a precision that showed a grasp of the thing that he was talking about so I decided to go on with the conversation.

"I am a newspaper man," I told him, "so I want to get a straight story on the strike." I showed him my press-card.

He read the card carefully and examined it to see whether it was genuine. Then he asked, "Do you write for the *New York Call*?" I told him that I did. "That is where I have seen your name," he said. "Well, I am glad to meet you," and we shook hands. A revolutionist carrying T. N. T. could scarcely have proceeded more cautiously in an identification than did these two Americans before they could talk about the one subject that was the common topic of conversation in that community.

Having satisfied himself that I was neither a government agent nor a company spy, the trainman talked freely about the causes of the strike, which he understood very well. He was a little ill at ease while we were talking. Although we were sitting at one end of an almost empty car, he kept turning to see that no one was coming up from behind. After giving an excellent picture of the strike situation, and scoring the railroad men for their failure to develop a feeling of solidarity higher than their feelings of craft, he described his personal life. He had been a Socialist for many years, and had taken an active part in an effort to start a radical paper in San Antonio. Then the war struck the country, playing havoc with his plans. At about the same time, his wife was taken sick and she had since remained in delicate health.

"I have learned that acquiescence is a great word," he said.

"I acquiesce. Of course I don't believe in what is going on, but what can one man or a handful do against the whole town, backed by the power of the state and the business interests? If you have ideas and express them, you're just bound to get into trouble, and in my present position, with a sick wife on my hands, I can't afford trouble, so I acquiesce."

Radicalism, through the middle west, is generally acquiescent. The members of the I. W. W. still have their say, and there are men and a few women, here and there, most of whom were trained in the pre-war days, who still speak their minds and hold up their heads, but the younger radicals learned, during the war, to keep their mouths shut and acquiesce.

This does not mean that people are not thinking radically. The country is full of men and women who see what is going on, and who are bitterly opposed to it, but when it comes to joining a radical organization, subscribing to a radical paper, or even going to a radical meeting, they think twice, and then usually acquiesce.

In Leavenworth

The sanest spirit that I found was that of the men with whom I spoke in the Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth. They have not abated their zeal; their vision is as keen as ever, but they realize that the tactics of 1912 will not win points in the next decade. They face five, ten, twenty years in the penitentiary, but they are bright, hopeful, and dead in earnest.

The radicalism in the middle west is under men's hats. How much is there of it? No one can say. When chance gives an opening, one finds it on all sides, but to date it remains acquiescent. Meanwhile, the business interests and

their representatives are doing everything in their power to muzzle it and destroy it.

The Great Event

Radicalism does not find a congenial atmosphere in the valley of the Mississippi. Labor is being broken by the ferocious attacks of the business interests. There is a tacit understanding, almost everywhere, that the chambers of commerce and the board of trade are, for the time being at least, the guardians of private as well as of public morality. These facts stand out against the background of hard times that one meets on the farm as well as in the town, but they are not the great event of the fall of the year.

It was in Springfield, Ohio, that I learned where the heart of America is during lovely autumn days. We were having very fair success in many of the towns—it was no uncommon thing to have five hundred people attend a meeting and stay to a discussion of the economic situation or disarmament. But at Springfield there were not five hundred, but five thousand, people—packed in the street, from curb to curb, standing on tip-toe, craning their necks before a base-ball score board.

Babe Ruth was at bat. First the pitcher threw a ball; then two strikes came in quick succession. These were succeeded by another ball, and yet another. The record stood three balls and two strikes. There was a general shifting of feet as the crowd pressed a step nearer to the score-board. The pitcher came into action again—it was a ball! Babe Ruth walked, and the crowd groaned aloud. Babe had failed to hit a homer—an incomparable catastrophe, beside which

the economic depression and the failure of the unemployment conference was as dust in the balance.

Then it was that the fact struck me with full force: I was dealing with boys! This close-packed mass of five thousand—multiplied again and again in all the principal cities and towns of the country—was a crowd of boys lost in the contemplation of one of their favorite amusements. I saw and understood that these millions were more interested in the outcome of a base-ball game than they were in the outcome of an Unemployment Conference or of an Arms Conference. They were more interested because base-ball was closer to them than either unemployment or war.

The impression was heightened as I went farther west on one of my trips. In St. Louis, base-ball was the principal topic of conversation. In Denver, the base-ball score was spread across the top of the evening papers in streaming headlines which forced the local scandal and suicide into an insignificant position. Here, two thousand miles from the scene of the game, the newsboys were shouting, "Extra! Extra! Final Score!" with the same energy and with the same results in increased sales that they would have met with in the east.

When our train was passing through Watrous, New Mexico, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the conductor ran into the tiny station and then hurried back into the smoking-car with the announcement: "The Giants are ahead, boys. Two home runs. The agent was cut off and couldn't get the complete message, but it is the end of the third."

In an instant the car was a hive, humming with a discussion of the possibilities that the next six innings might hold. One weather-beaten miner, after threshing out the question with his companion, leaned back in his seat. "I sure would like to see that game," he sighed.

This was not a mob, gorged with the blood-letting of an arena, nor the clamorous multitude whooping at the heels of a toreador. It was an aggregation of sportsmen, analyzing, comparing, attacking, defending, watching each play, hanging breathless over the newspaper stories, intelligent, well-informed, enjoying to the uttermost one of the most momentous events of the whole year.

Between the games, these men found many things to interest them. There were the thrilling news-stories, the sensations that occupied the headlines, the propaganda against Russia and Germany which still holds so prominent a place in the dailies of the smaller cities, and, above all, there were the sports, which have come to their own as the life of the newspapers. Then, with each Sunday, there appeared the funnies—Mutt and Jeff, the Gumps, Bringing Up Father. All across the continent these famous characters cut their weekly caper for the benefit of multitudes.

The chief substitute for the excitement of the World's Series games was provided by the movies. Charlie Chaplin, with his antics; Mary Pickford—embodiment of innocence and virtue—and Douglas Fairbanks with his athletics captivate and please their tens of millions.

Base-ball, press-stunts, film-stars—here was the nation's centre of attention; its lode-star. Cranks and theorists might look elsewhere, but the masses of the people turned here for consolation.

Yet here was nothing that was degenerate and little that was coarse. Horse-play, movement, innocence, virtue, beauty, strength, skill, courage, the triumph of the right,—making their appeal to health and to youth.

Childhood

This, then, was the American people—an embodiment of healthy, vigorous, normal childhood. And this explained so much!

The American worker had gone along his path of daily duty, innocently enough, while the profiteers took the forests, the coal, the iron, the copper, the railroads, the water-falls. He had made only a faint protest when he was told that the same piratical bands were making away with the railroads, the power-supply sites, the street railway and other public franchises. He never became much interested in the subject of money and banking—it was too involved; and as for the problems of international finance, they were far beyond him. He was so unused to the world that he did not even take the trouble to join hands with his fellows, but was content to remain unorganized or to belong to a craft union that was as separate from the other craft unions as though they lived and worked on separate continents. He was quite willing to permit the politicians and the lawyers to represent him in public affairs, and to tell him how to vote. Indeed, in the elections of 1920 he had voted sixteen millions strong for Harding, with another nine millions for Cox, on the supposition that one of these men—both of whom were backed by powerful business interests—would get him out of his scrapes. The American worker had been led into bondage, into war and back into bondage again, without knowing where he was going or why. He had been led very much as a teacher leads children about an elementary school.

What were the dominant characteristics of these men and

women? Ignorance, innocence, a love of play and adventure, a desire to "do" things and people,—the outstanding characteristics of childhood.

No wise teacher goes into an elementary class with a problem in geometry and asks the children to solve it. Still less does he get cross if they fail in its solution. Yet here was a little band of revolutionaries, radicals, reformers, presenting to the American people some of the most complicated social theories that the human mind has ever evolved, and exasperated beyond measure when the people failed to grasp the import of the theories or to act on their implications.

Why had the Socialists and the Communists and the Industrial Workers of the World been able to enroll a membership of less than two hundred thousand in a population of a hundred million after years of effort? Either because the radicals were wrong in their theories or because they were trying to teach geometry in the elementary grades. The latter seems to be the correct explanation.

A comprehension of any social theory involves two things: first, a reasonable freedom from prejudices and pre-conceptions,—that is, an open mind; second, the ability to think in abstract terms and to become convinced of the practicability of something that is not immediately possible. Neither of these things is possible to a person who is accustomed to see life through base-ball scores and movie films.

The conclusion of the whole matter is obvious—those who wish to reach the American people and give them a conception of the problems that are before them must organize an elementary school and teach in an elementary way.

An Elementary School

The American people have their education in public affairs still before them. Intellectually they are no more backward than the people of any of the great countries of Europe. Their reactions are the normal reactions of early life—of childhood. They are sound, healthy and ignorant of economics, sociology and political science. They have learned how to produce goods but they have never learned how to distribute them, nor have they learned that the end of all state-craft is the advancement of community well-being.

There are two ways in which the American people may secure the knowledge of public matters of which they are in such great need. One is through experience; the other is through education. The path of experience is hard. The method of experience is the most expensive method of gaining knowledge. Education consists in imparting the collected experiences of the race to the new generation. This is the cheapest and most efficient means for the spreading of knowledge.

There are many radicals who look with alarm on the path that America is treading—the path of imperialism, conquest, militarism. They are convinced that this path leads finally to the destruction of the nations that practice it. They are eager to do something that will head off the policy before it is too late. How shall they act?

On the one hand, they may throw up their hands and say, "Let the dubbs go! They will learn in time. A little more starvation and another war will teach them. There is no other way!"

This is reliance on experience—the most expensive method of securing knowledge. Furthermore it is a confession that all of the elaborate means of education and propaganda that have been developed over thousands of years amount to nothing. Did the German children learn nothing about the greatness of the Fatherland? Were the American papers totally ineffective in convincing the people that this country should enter the war in 1917? Does not all the recent experience and the ancient experience of the race, too, show that the spoken and written word, the picture and the drama (if they are spoken and written effectively enough and often enough) have immense power over the minds of men? It was not necessary for the ruling class in the United States to wait until German armies were on the Atlantic coast to convince the American people that something must be done. So it is not necessary for the radical to wait till hell breaks loose again to convince the American people that their welfare lies in a fundamental change in their economic and political ideas and institutions. In fact, there are already tens of thousands of men and women,—particularly among the younger people—who are asking: “Where can I get a job that will let me earn a living and at the same time retain my self-respect?” or “What can I do to further the cause of fundamental economic and social change?” or “Is there any place in the labor movement where I can work for the future and at the same time make a living?”

The Task Ahead

There must be some answer to these eager ones,—specific tasks enumerated; assignment to definite fields of activity;

training, in labor schools and colleges, for regular work in the forward-looking movements. Some of these people are just graduating from college. Others are trained technicians. All are needed in the building of the new society.

This is a specialized task that is being undertaken through workers' education and the agencies for the placing of radicals at the strategic posts of the labor movement.

There remains the great task of reaching the masses of the people,—the millions who read the papers, see the movies, watch the base-ball scores and do the world's work. Here there are two general methods of approach—through organization or through propaganda. The two are usually combined in some degree.

Organizations are of five main kinds,—organizations of producers on the job; co-operative organizations of producers or of consumers; political organizations; propaganda organizations; mutual benefit organizations. All five of these types of organizations exist in some stage of development in most of the population centres of the United States. The work has been begun. The initial steps have been taken. There remains the task of strengthening these organizations numerically and of shaping their policies away from a blind acceptance of the past to a purposeful molding of the future.

This work can be done by those who belong to the organizations in question, and by no one else, unless it is proposed to build a whole new and dual structure of organizations. And if those in the existing organizations come into the new ones, the latter will be as conservative as the old groups. No organization can long continue to express a point of view that is not accepted by its membership—particularly if the organization is a voluntary one. The trouble with the organizations of the labor movement in the United States is that

their membership is made up of the rank and file of the American people—a rank and file that is both conservative and uninformed.

Information will be imparted most readily through the existing channels of organization. New organizations will spring up, but the bulk of the people remain in the old ones and, if they are to be reached anywhere, it will be in the organizations of which they are already members.

The second field is that of education or propaganda, and it is in this field that the important work of the immediate future lies. The rank and file of the American people cannot be expected to join organizations of the labor movement until they find out why. The purpose of propaganda is to answer that question.

There are a number of avenues of propaganda open to the labor movement. First there is the printed page,—books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, posters. Second, there are the bookstore and the news-stand as channels for regular distribution. Third, there is the screen. Fourth, there are meetings, lectures, and debates. Fifth, there is art and literature. Through all of these channels, ideas are being distributed, and the man or woman who is seeking a method of saying something has a wide choice of the means.

In both organization work and propaganda, however, one thing must be borne in mind—the rank and file of the American people are babes when it comes to questions of public policy.

Those who are seeking to do the work of either organization or of propaganda must bear in mind the character of the American people. America is vibrant with an immense life-force; an energy; a driving power; a determination; a will to success. The climate, the abundant resources, the race-stock—all of these things have combined to make the American a

frontiersman; a pioneer. Thus far his energies have been devoted to the task of producing and accumulating material wealth. His ideals point primarily in this direction, and his education has taught him to measure success in dollars. Still, he is young. His spirit is vigorous. His vitality is unsapped. He is neither decadent nor degenerate. Filled with the buoyancy of youth he is working, playing, and beginning to look about him for fresh worlds to conquer. He is even asking where these worlds lie and how they may be reached. It is the answer to these questions that the organizations and the propaganda of the labor movement must supply.

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70 Fifth Ave., New York.

The League for Industrial Democracy—the successor of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society—has for its object “education for a new social order based on production for use and not for profit”.

The educational program of the League includes:

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(2) The development of a readable and scientific pamphlet and book literature on the labor, socialist and allied movements.

(3) The promotion of research work on specific problems of the new social order.

(4) The development of a national speakers' service.

(5) The publication of facts concerning the immediate labor struggle and the encouragement of all efforts at workers' education.

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